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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE; NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WATERS

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TAGS: [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: QADURA FARIS: ABBAS-OLMERT MEETING, PRISONERS,
FATAH

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Begin Summary. Fatah grassroots leader Qadura Faris told the Consul General in a December 27 meeting that he anticipates Palestinians will be disappointed by the implementation of Israeli gestures announced after the December 23 meeting between PA President Abbas and PM Olmert and that this disappointment could have negative political consequences for President Abbas. He said he fears the limited cease-fire in Gaza will further unravel and he does not anticipate significant improvements to access and movement in the West Bank. Faris will lead Palestinian participation in the joint committee on prisoners, but he has limited expectations in this area, either. He said the GoI may release some prisoners around the 'Id al-Adha (early January), but if those released are few in number and/or are criminals or those nearing the end of their sentences, there will be no political benefit for Abbas. Faris said Fatah must be reformed and brought closer to the people. He identified West Bank/Gaza grassroots committees as a good first step, if they limit the role of the Fatah Central Committee, but they are not enough. Fatah will have to do better to compete with Hamas among students and other populations in Gaza and the West Bank, where Hamas provides much needed services. End Summary.

Cease-Fire, Checkpoints

¶2. (C) In a December 27 meeting with the Consul General, Fatah grassroots leader Qadura Faris said the December 23 meeting between PA President Abbas and PM Olmert had created hope and expectation among the Palestinians, but he feared that implementation of the Israeli steps announced after the meeting will be disappointing. Faris said he believes the Gaza cease-fire "may totally collapse." (Note: Seven Qassams were launched from Gaza and injured two Israelis on December 27. End note). Faris said he does not expect significant easing of obstacles to West Bank movement, despite the positive reports after the meeting. He said some fifty-seven obstacles are being considered for removal, but none are major checkpoints as defined by the average Palestinian, and many are simply dirt mounds. Faris said he believes disappointing the Palestinian people will rebound negatively for Abbas.

Prisoners

¶3. (C) Faris said he will lead the Palestinian side of the joint committee on prisoners, which was revived by the Olmert-Abbas meeting, noting that Issa Qaraqa and Hisham Abd al-Razik will also join the committee. He said their names

were provided to the GoI, and he expects the committee to meet after 'Id al-Adha (early January). Faris said the committee will discuss criteria for release, but he indicated he has low expectations.

14. (C) Faris said the GoI may release prisoners during 'Id, but he doubts such a release will entail political benefit for President Abbas, since it will likely be a small number and drawn from politically irrelevant categories; i.e., criminals or those nearing the end of their sentences. Faris said that if the GoI do such a small, "not serious" release of prisoners for Abbas, and then releases a significant number of prisoners to Hamas in exchange for Cpl Shalit, it will undermine Abbas. By contrast, he said, a significant release -- he proposed 400 -- through negotiations and separate from Shalit would strengthen Abbas and undermine advocates of violent resistance.

Fatah

15. (C) Faris pointed to President Abbas' recent efforts to reform Fatah, specifically to establish Gaza and West Bank grassroots committees independent of the Fatah Central Committee (FCC). (Note: The Gaza committee has been established, but its chain of command has not yet been confirmed. Composition of the West Bank committee is still being discussed. End Note.) Faris said these committees are important, but not sufficient, for serious reform. He welcomed the composition of the Gaza committee and Abbas' agreement that the committees not report to the FCC, but he questioned the committees' mandates and resources. He said there must be serious reform of Fatah -- regardless of whether there are early elections -- and the political

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movement must be closer to the people and farther from the FCC. He noted that Hamas is well-resourced and generally does better than Fatah at meeting people's needs and expectations, pointing to examples such as shuttle buses for students and 'Id gifts for children.

New Government

16. (C) Faris said discussion of a new government has gone back to the starting point, with Hamas now talking about a national unity government (NUG), rather than a government of technocrats. Faris said he believes Abbas should accept a NUG even with a Hamas prime minister, as long as it includes competent ministers, such as Salam Fayyad, and endorses a clear political program based on Abbas' March 2006 letter of designation to PM Hanniyeh with an additional reference to the "prisoners' document." However, Faris acknowledged that persuading Hamas to this new government would be difficult, noting that negotiators on all sides have "personal agendas."

Marwan Barghouti

17. (C) Faris is close to jailed Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti and confirmed Barghouti's transfer to a hospital from prison for treatment of a throat problem. Faris said the problem is a recurring one and he would visit Barghouti December 29. He added that he understands Abbas pressed Olmert to release Barghouti and that it would be a mistake for the GoI to include Barghouti in an exchange for Shalit and to give Hamas the credit for his release.

WALLES